

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06
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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7372
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
USINT BAGHDAD
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
USLO RIYADH

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 1684
C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (ADDED INFO ADDEES BAGHDAD & CAIRO)
E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PEPR, SY, EG
SUBJECT: MORE TALK OF ARAB RECONCILIATION

1. A REMARKABLE EDITORIAL WAS CARRIED BY TISHRIIN MARCH 20:
"IT IS NOT EXAGGERATION TO SAY THAT ISRAEL HAS MISSED
A HISTORIC CHANCE FOR ESTABLISHING A JUST AND LASTING PEACE,
A CHANCE THAT MAY NOT BE OFFERED AGAIN." THE EDITORIAL
CONCLUDED AT LENGTH THAT THE ONLY ALTERNATIVE IS FOR ARAB
STATES TO PREPARE FOR CONFRONTATION WITH ISRAEL AND ITS
ALLIES. WE FOUND IT HARD TO BELIEVE TISHRIIN, WHICH IS
PRESIDENT ASSAD'S CREATION, WAS ADMITTING EVEN INDIRECTLY
THAT THE SADAT INITIATIVE WAS A HISTORIC CHANCE FOR PEACE,
YET THIS IS THE INTERPRETATION TISHRIIN DEPUTY EDITOR RIFAI
GAVE POLOFF MARCH 23.

2. HOW MANY TIMES, ASKED RIFAI, WILL THE AREA BE FORCED
TO GO BACK TO ZERO IN TRYING TO RESOLVE THIS INCREDIBLY
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COMPLEX CONFLICT? THE CONFLICT IS ROOTED IN HATRED AND
BEREAVEMENT, NOT ONLY BETWEEN JEWS AND ARABS BUT BETWEEN
ARABS AND ARABS. NO ONE CAN DENY, ACCORDING TO RIFAI,
THAT THE SOLUTION IS MADE MORE COMPLEX BECAUSE OF THE WARS
BETWEEN THE ARABS. IT IS EQUALLY COMPLICATED BY THE
JEALOUSIES AND ASPIRATIONS OF OUTSIDE POWERS WHO TRANSFER
THEIR GLOBAL DIFFERENCES TO THE MIDDLE EAST ARENA AND FIND

IT IMPOSSIBLE TO COOPERATE TO SEEK A SOLUTION. BRIEFLY, RIFAI CLAIMED, WHEN SADAT WENT TO JERUSALEM, THERE WAS A MOMENT WHEN PEOPLE DARED TO HOPE THAT THE OLD HATREDS COULD BE OVERCOME, BUT BEGIN ANSWERED SADAT WITH THE SAME TIRED CLICHES AND PROCEEDED TO QUIBBLE OVER EVERY POINT. THE SADAT INITIATIVE DIED QUICKLY, ITS DEATH AGONY HAS TAKEN LONGER. THE PALESTINIANS' ATTACK IN ISRAEL WAS NOT THE MORTAL BLOW, RIFAI CONCLUDED, BUT SIMPLY RECOGNITION THAT ISRAEL DID NOT HAVE THE VISION TO RESPOND TO SADAT AND THAT THE OLD HATREDS HAD ONCE MORE COME TO THE FORE.

3. THIS THEME HAS NOT BEEN PICKED UP AGAIN BY THE MEDIA WHICH HAS CONTINUED THE "STEADFASTNESS" LINE IN THE WAKE OF THE EVENTS IN LEBANON. NEVERTHELESS, TISHRIIN'S EDITORIAL AND RIFAI'S APPROACH MAY BE A FURTHER SIGNAL (DAMASCUS 1552) THAT ASSAD IS THINKING OF A WAY TO RECONCILE HIS DIFFERENCES WITH SADAT. SYRIANS HAVE AN ANNOYING HABIT OF APPROVING INITIATIVES LIKE GENEVA AFTER THEY HAVE FAILED AND ASSAD MAY BE CAUTIOUSLY PREPARING THE GROUND TO DO SO ONCE AGAIN IN CONNECTION WITH SADAT'S INITIATIVES TO ALLOW HONORABLE RECONCILIATION. WE NOTE THAT THERE ARE SOME VOICES BEING RAISED IN CAIRO ALONG THE SAME LINES ALTHOUGH FROM A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE (CAIRO 9161). THE PUBLIC SIGNALS IN SYRIA THUS FAR ARE SO MUTED THAT WE ASSUME NO IMMINENT CHANGE IN SYRIAN POLICY IS IN THE WORKS. MOREOVER, THE SYRIAN OLIVE BRANCH IS PREDICATED ON SADAT'S FAILURE WHICH THE LATTER DOES NOT

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APPEAR PREPARED TO ADMIT. NEVERTHELESS, WE CONCLUDE THAT INSOFAR AS ASSAD IS CONCERNED, RECONCILIATION IS NOT ONLY POSSIBLE, BUT IS NECESSARY IF THE ARAB WORLD IS TO SUCCESSFULLY PRESS ITS CASE WITH ISRAEL.

MURPHY

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